DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 203 550 EC 132 814

AUTHOR Juhasz, Joseph B.
TITLE Imagery and Creativity: An Historical Perspective.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 11p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Montreal, Canada, September, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Creativity: History: *Imagination: *Theories

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the recurrent associations between imagining and creativity. The thesis of the paper is that the assumed connection between these two processes depends on their conceptualizations. Creativity is variously conceptualized as unitary or a binary process. Imagining is variously characterized as active or passive. These two dimensions produce a fourfold conceptualization of the connection between imagining and creativity as necessary and sufficient, necessary but not sufficient, sufficient but not necessary, and neither sufficient nor necessary. An historical examination of Greek thinkers shows that these positions occur in an order that can be predicted from theory. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED203550

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Joseph B. Juhasz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Imagery and Creativity: An Historical Perspective

Joseph B. Juhasz
College of Environmental Design
University of Colorado, Boulder

The connection between imagery and creativity is, in part, a controversial and an historical one because synchronically and diachronically the definitions of the phenomena (or conceptions of the processes involved) themselves are controversial. We cannot specify what the connection (if any) between imagery and creativity may be until we have defined them -- and in this case the defining often serves to specify the hypothesized connection.

Greek philosophy, to which fundamental ideas and positions in Western scholarship can often conveniently be traced, with its well-known conventional history of successions and influences, will provide us with the paradigmatic options for defining imagery, creativity and the connection between them. These fundamental positions, at various times, are considered so common-sensical, so obvious, or so silly that we have to be reminded of the fact that they have an historical beginning.

"In illo tempore" -- at the beginning, we conventionally place the Milesian thinkers. Their traditional position as point of departure was earned by their break with animistic explanations for natural phenomena. In seeking for a description of the reality that underlies the appearance of everyday experience, they identified simple elements, or building blocks in nature. These building blocks, in hindsight unsurprisingly, they found to be non-observable -- they had to be inferred from the varieties of direct experience. I would argue that implicit in this position (and whether the Milesians would have subscribed to what I am about to say is pedantic in this context) is the notion that creation (generation) of <u>everything</u> is done <u>one way</u>: from the simple to the complex and from the non-observable to the observable. All acts of creation are then similar. Given this perspective, the role of imagery becomes that of paring away at the inessentials of observation to reveal the essential unity of underlying experience. The image, in this sense, is a creative tool for sculpting that underlying reality which is implicit but not visible with the corporeal eye: it is an essentially active and constructive process -- an instrument necessary and sufficient for the achievement of creative acts. Images are the building blocks of creative acts. It is almost as if the two definitions -- creativity as a unitary process, imagining as an active process -- directed a connection between the two, where the latter becomes a precondition of the former.

EC 132814

It is, again, conventional to present the Pythagoreans as offering a challenge to the naturalism and even materialism of the Milesians. The Pythagoreans accept the challenge that the aim of human knowledge of self and world is to reveal an underlying reality which is masked by appearance or seeming. According to them, though, the material elements -- water, or air, or fire or earth -- are nothing but endless grounds for the flames of the phantoms of the babble of loquacious debate over finally nothing more but more mere appearance: no one can decide which of the elements is the ultimate underlying reality. According to the Pythagoreans, under material appearance is ratio, proportion, measure, number. To create, in this context, is to participate in the harmonies of numberless number vibrating and resonating in the symphony of the universe: this is a unitary process; there is only one orchestra. To create is to resonate to the world according to one's nature: it is to find one's nature in harmonious relations with the universe. Again, what resonates is imagining, but the process is not the active sculpting one of the Milesians but a passive, receptive attitude which assures oneness with self and nature. The image, once again, is the tool of human creation, but it is a tool not wielded by self but rather by the cosmic forces of the universe, of which self is but a manifestation. Image is passive, perhaps even deja vu, here, the departure from the Milesians; creativity is untary, here, the participation with Milesian assumptions: together, the implication is that imagining is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creativity.

Heraclitus would be commonly mentioned as the "respondent" to the Pythagorean position. As I read Heraclitan fragments and commentary on the Heraclitans, their move was to distinguish between different kinds or modes of creation (creative activity). Specifically, the distiction implicit between the "seeming" and the "real" world, already specified by the Milesians and the Pythagoreans is formalized into two "different" worlds differently generated. For Heraclitus, the "real" world is the one available to the senses; the world that is unreal is generated in dreams and dreamlike states by what we would today call fantasy. This is a "common sense" philosophy that would say "What is real; I'll tell you what is real; my thumb is real" or "What's unreal? I'll tell you what's unreal; my dreams are unreal." It is in the social and thus the publicly verifiable concensus that the way of uncovering seeming lies. The real world is built up through accurate and critical sense perception. False creation, the creation of phantoms, is personal and unique, non-consensual -- this is the world of dreams and fictions. As the building blocks of reality

are sensations, so the building blocks of fantasy are the ghosts of sensations: images. This fantasizing -- as its realistic counterpart, sensing -- is not a passive process but one in which the organism and the social unit (as appropriate) build up an accurate and increasingly realistic set of circumstances in which to operate. From the viewpoint of this paper, then, the Heraclitan position views imagining as an active process located in the organism but links it up to only one of the two kinds of creativity, the bad, the unrealistic one. The Milesian linkage between imagining and creating is maintained but only for one of two kinds of creating. Thus, imagining becomes a sufficient but not necessary condition of creative acts, the necessity of the condition depending on the type of creative activity under consideration.

The realism and common-sense approach of the Heraclitans was rudely burlesqued by the Eleatic philosophers who "logically" demonstrated that the observations of change and becoming, commonly made by anyone, are in fact based on propositional impossibilities. Although, as with many later ironic and intentionally self-destructive philosophies, it is often difficult to tell what the Eleatics mean by their arguments; what the arguments meant is clear enough. Beginning with Parmenides and through Melissus, these thinkers showed that is, is incapable of change, for were it capable of change, then it would be something else. If, however, changing your mind about reality is itself change, we can fairly ask how these philosophers changed their minds or expected their hearers to change their minds. Their answer: revelation from a transcendent source (some non-material being who is not in the stranglehold of being). As with the Pythagorean reaction to Milesian materialism, so, the Eleatic reaction to Heraclitan Sensationism/Realism drew upon supernatural elements in whose thrall human beings are when they are in touch with reality. This position clearly makes the role of imagining (conversing with supernatural personages who partake of the not-here and the not-now) a passive one. Again, as with the Heraclitans, we are also given two creative processes: a healthy and realistic one, and the unhealthy and illusory one; only the valuation is turned upside-down; the world of the senses gives us the false vision of a material universe subject to change; the world of the inspired philosopher gives us access to a supernatural world in illuminated fantasy. This suprasensory contact is, however, reserved to the elect; it is a passive receptivity rather than an active seeking or construction. As with the Pythagoreans, then, so with the Eleatics, the imaginings of the truly creative person are the passive instruments of a higher power, itself both at once inside and outside the imaginer; as with the

Heraclitans, creation is a dual process, only one of which is associated with creativity -- in this instance "good" rather than "bad" or illusory creation. Of all the positions implied by defining creativity as single or multiple process and imagining as active or passive, this position gives the most tenuous connection between the two: imagining is neither a sufficient (an outside force is needed) nor a necessary (for there are kinds of creativity not associated with imagining) condition of creativity.

Thus, by about 2,500 years ago, four major divisions of the field defining the relation between imagining and creativity had been established. This was done on the basis of taking alternate positions on two dimesions: is imagining a passive or active process? Is creativity a unitary or multidimensional process? Defining the problem in this way seems to yield commitment to anything from a part/whole to a rather tenuous connection between the two processes. This can be illustrated in the following chart:

CREATIVITY	IMAGINING: ACTIVE	IMAGINING: PASSIVE
UNITARY	imagining as a necessary and sufficient precondition of creative acts (e.g. Milesians)	imagining as a necessary but not sufficient precondition of creative acts (e.g. Pythagoreans)
MULTIDIMENSIONAL	imagining as a sufficient but not necessary condition of creative acts (e.g. Heraclitans)	imagining as neither necessary nor sufficient for the occurence of creative acts (e.g. Eleatics)

These Four Houses of Imagining and Creativity are the basis, still today, for the fundamental divisions of the field. Although we have neither the time nor the resources nor the research capability to explore all of intellectual history on this matter, the scheme itself suggests as questions for discussion and research at least two issues: are these four houses exhaustive of the positions that have subsequently been taken in relating the two processes to one another? Is there some inevitable, or at least generally applicable, progression between them for which the paradigm is the order of the four positions established by the early resocratics. For, linearly, we can show the following successions of positions relating imagining to creativity:

active imagining unitary creativity	passive imagining unitary creativity	active imagining multi-d creativity	passive imagining multi-d creativity
NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT RELATION	NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT RELATION	SUFFICIENT BUT NOT NECESSARY RELATION	NEITHER SUFFICIENT NOR NECESSARY RELATION

The second question for exploration we have just posed is the easiest to look at, for we can follow the traditional History of Greek Philosophy to see if indeed the next four positions at least will be some kind of restatement of the fundamental positions established by the Milesians and Pythagoreans. Where did Greek philosophy go from the Eleatic challenge to reason and material reality?

The Empedocleans, who are considered to be the next major "school" after the Eleatics, explained change, both material and spiritual, by ascribing manifest reality to be the outcome of an unending and unresolvable struggle between two opposing forces: love and strife, heating and cooling, life and death. Creation is always accompanied by destruction, just as life and death are complementary processes. What creation there is is nevertheless a unitary process involving the heating, the bringing together of disparate elements: creation is the life process, the fundamental eros or libido itself. This is a unitary process; there is no "good" and "bad" creation as with the Heraclitans or Eleatics, although reality itself involves a constant exchange between creation and destruction. If creation is the life process, then knowing is the active bringing together of the knower and the known -- the union of subject and object and their assimilation to one another. This bringing together of the knower and the known, the discovery of Love and Strife is a positive

achievement of an active imagining process. Once again, we have here a search for an underlying reality and one that can be constructed by human fantasy -- in fact, the repetition of the part/whole relationship between imagining and creativity implicit in the Milesian position.

The atomists, who are again usually mentioned as next in succession to the Empedocleans (though here we are dealing with some chronological overlap), developed the most consistently materialist position of any group of thinkers up to that time. Can their materialism line them up into any kind of correspondence with the highly mythically oriented Pythagorean predecessors? The claim of the atomists (e.g. Democritus) is the, to us, well-known proposition that all apprehendable things are due to various combinations of irreducable minimum building blocks of matter. Change and becomming are the outcome of their recombinations. Like predecessors and followers, however, the atomists could not produce any of their building blocks for public inspection -- the atoms were knowable only through their manifestations -- their existence was inferred. But how? Not by an active, seeking, constructive intellect but rather by the blind and fated collision of atoms in the body which is intellection: thought, imagining, feeling, whatever. In this sense, imaginings are the passive outcome of mechanical forces latent in the interaction of atoms; in relation to sensations, they become passive copies thereof. The single mode of creation, collision of particles, is the same force that creates the images that accompany creative acts -- passive imagining, unitary creativity -- once again resulting in a choice of necessary but not sufficient relation. Note, though, that the atomists come closest to a kind of "epiphenomenon" option in regard to imagining. This option has been explored also in more recent times by thoroughgoing materialists. From our analysis, though, the notion of "epiphenomenon" is not terribly interesting -- if creative acts are invariably preceded by imagining but produced by some third outside force, we still have the necessary but not sufficient relationship between the two.

At this point (already) issues of "schools" and "succession" become rather clouded in the history of philosophy (perhaps because less of the history is inferential and reconstructive). Collectively, the next class of characters nevertheless are called the Sophists. To treat this diverse and cantankerous group of individualists as a group is to try to reduce them to some least common denominator, which can probably be done by saying that as a group they were impressed by the enormous gap between convention (or the conventional) and

nature (or the natural); thus, between what is sacred and inviolable and that which is changable and improvable. In this sense, they, like all their predecessors, are trying to identify that which is appearance and that which is reality. They tended to see culture and its manifestations to be the arbitrary (the seeming, the appearance); thus, writing -- a cultural invention -- and even speech was viewed as corrupt, removed from the realm of being and nature. The closer we come to action -- the more we evade mere speech or show -- the closer we come to the uncorrupted and the inevitable. Much of the writing of the Sophists, then, has a sophistical ring because as writing, it is ironic and self-destructive, for it wants to serve as a sort of Brechition goad to action. As the Eleatics, then, the Sophists produced much ironic prose, depracating the self-defeating quality of verbal processes, such as Gorgias' famous tract "On Not-Being or On Nature" which is said to have begun as follows:

> "I say nothing exists; then that if it exists it is unknowable; lastly, even if it exists and is knowable, nevertheless, it cannot be communicated to anyone else." (Note that the argument defeats itself, in words.)

This demonstration of the destructive potential of words (culture), the hollowness of cultural creativity, and, in a sense, that of reason, sounds exciting and upsetting even today (though it may be more familiar a stance to us than it may have been a generation or so ago). The creativity of speech and language is by implication presented as the creativity of deception -- this is opposed to the generative power of (honest) action. In mentation, this may be said to represent the struggle of the mimetic power of image against the representative power of language (conventional signification). Although these are, of course, words that the Sophists would not have used, their view that creation is a double process -- with cultural/verbal modes being "bad" creation and action-oriented and mimetic ones being "good" creation -- seems reasonably clear. This is really quite a strong turn on the Heraclitan screw. Imagining is, as with the Heraclitans, an active, mimetic, imitative, action-oriented process, and, thus, the sufficient but not necessary precondition of creative acts (cultural creation is not dependent on them).

One of the classic problems in Greek philosophical history is: Is Socrates a Sophist? I do not propose to solve that problem here today but will simply ask the question: Are Socrates' definitions of imagining and/or creativity different from those of the Sophists, and do those positions (if they are different) affect his position on the connection between them in the predicted way.

Socrates' position on imagining and creativity, in its turn, is dependent on the interpretation we give or the role we think it appropriate to assign to his "Demon" -- a quasi-Eleatic device he used for obtaining knowledge other than through dialectic with fellow humans. I am well aware of the fact that what I am about to say is controversial, but it is certainly possible to read (about) Socrates and come away with the conclusion that dialectic (speech) is the pathway to <u>human</u> truth (contingent truth) and that the voice of the Demon is the way to <u>trancendent</u> truth (uncontingent truth). Irrespective of the valuation placed upon the two sorts of truth, that the truths are different as the voices are different, is, I think, probably not controversial. Thus, they represent two modes of creation -- they are two modes of creation -- (possibly both "valid" possibly not; possibly not equally valid; possibly valid in different contexts and for different purposes, but nevertheless <u>different</u>). The way to the Demonic mode of creation is through auditory imagery; this much, in the case of Socrates is clear beyond argument. The ear that hears the Demon is a passive vehicle of her power -- it responds and does not shape; it is a passive power (the power of imagery is) -- this is also clear beyond argument. It is here, then, in the passive nature of imagery as a process, that the Socratic position is different from the standard Sophist one. Socrates' position, then, is in a respect similar to that of the Eleatics in that it ultimately despairs of finding truth except through inspiration -- yet, the power of the intellect is much less in question than it was for the Eleatics -- this, of course, a lead into Plato and Aristotle.

We find that indeed the next four positions taken have followed the template originally established by the early Presocratics. Yet, the template has grown, for we can now ask of those who view creativity as a multidimensional process whether they consider the creativity associated with imagining as good or as the bad kind of creativity.

		Creativity			
		unidimensional		multidimensional	
		good	bad	good	bad
Imagining	associated w/ creativity	Milesians I; Empedocleans V	empty	Sophists VII	Heraclitus III
active	not associated w/creativity	empty	empty	empty	empty
	associated w/creativity	Pythagoreans II	empty	Eleatics IV; Socrates? VIII	
passive	not associated w/creativity	Atomists VI; empty	empty	empty	empty

In asking this question, though, we realize just how constrained the categories of relating imagining to creativity are by a relatively narrow template. For, for example, no one seems to identify <u>one</u> kind of creativity as bad -- or <u>one</u> kind of creativity as unrelated to imagery. These choices are reserved for multidimensional models of creativity. If we can think of all the various dimensions which might affect the definition of a relation between imagining and creativity and the conceptual freedom provided by even two dimensions, then the amazing constraint shown by eight well-studied and chronologically distinct "schools" provide surprising evidence for how relatively unanimous we are about the association between imagery and creativity, as well as for the extreme selectivity of the human mind for options with which to deal with phenomena. This selectivity should be grounds for confidence both in the ability of the mind to select important positions and in the small but nevertheless multiple truths with which it presents us synchronically (as today) and diachronically as in the "history" of pre-Platonic Greek philosphy.

Earlier, we asked if the four houses of imagery are exhaustive of the positions taken in relation to the question of the connection between imagining and creativity. We have received a partial answer to that question today: whether, in fact, these four positions are exhaustive or not, they represent an amazingly narrow constraint on possible positions. This narrowness of constraint can be applied to manifestations of mind in general, for mind narrows further than it could were it not constrained by its own truth and nature; yet, it never narrows to the truth, for truth is multiple in the moment and between the ages.